



### Get to know how things work

We thought members might appreciate a bit of a refresher on exactly how we operate as a “self-managed site”. Here, David Housego, our Chair, answers some typical questions.

#### **Q. So what exactly is PACA?**

**A.** Pitshanger Allotments and Conservation Association (PACA) was set up in 2001 when we became a “self managed” site leased from Ealing Council. All tenants become members of PACA on taking their tenancies with equal rights to influence policy.

#### **Q. What are PACA’s objectives?**

**A.** To administer the lease granted by the council by ensuring that the site is used for its primary purposes of cultivation of crops and for the promotion of physical well being and that the whole site is maintained in the

best condition for the long term enjoyment and benefit of its members.

#### **Q. Why is the Annual General Meeting (AGM) so important?**

**A.** The AGM, which takes place every September shortly before tenancies are renewed, is important for two main reasons:

This is where all members have an opportunity to influence or change PACA policy. You can do this by submitting a resolution prior to the meeting and then presenting it at the meeting for a vote.

For example, two resolutions were presented last September. One, to limit plot holdings to 5 rods, was defeated; another, to allow dogs on site on leads between 1st November and end of February for a trial period was approved by a narrow majority.

The AGM is also where members of the Management Committee are elected to serve. Any PACA member who wishes to be more actively involved has the opportunity to offer him or herself for office at this meeting.

#### **Q. What is the Management Committee and what does it do?**

**A.** The Management Committee consists of 9 members and meets every 2 months. Its duties include ensuring the terms of our lease from Ealing council are met and that individual plots and the site as a whole are maintained in a way which conforms to PACA’s objectives.

The Committee is also responsible for overseeing PACA’s finances, administering tenancies, liaising with other relevant bodies, communicating with members and organising educational or social events.

### Get Ready for Trading

After a brief hibernation and a well deserved rest for Robert Reynolds and his helpers, the trading hut will reopen for business on Saturday 15th February at 9.30 am and will then offer its normal Saturday/ Sunday 9.30 till Midday service until winter descends again. Robert already has a good supply of onion and shallot sets and is expecting in 7 varieties of potato very soon. So please drop in to get your early spring planting essentials.

Robert is very keen to get your views on how the Trading Hut can improve its service and hopes you will either speak to him or post your ideas in the grey metal box outside the Hut. He also wishes to thank all the kind volunteers who helped out last year and hopes they will sign up for further stints this coming year.

### Making Your Views Count: Questionnaire results

Thanks to all of you who responded to our recent questionnaire survey. Nearly 10% of you found time to do so and over Christmas too. Statisticians may quibble but given the terrible weather, it’s not such a bad response.

More than half of you have had your plots for over five years and no replies were received from any new tenants. I wonder why. Perhaps this is reflected in the age profile of respondents with not a single reply from anyone under 50!! Something to do with time perhaps. I can’t believe we don’t have a few under 50s floating around with views to express. There was an equal split between those in employment and pensioners. Most of you cultivate your plots on your own but around 30% have the help of an associate member.

When it comes to the problems we face

with cultivating our plots the most frequently cited reason was “lack of time” closely followed by “pests damaging crops”. Other problems mentioned included: “weeds”, “lack of storage” and the highly topical “flooding”. It was interesting that no one mentioned “theft” as a problem.

As the questionnaire was primarily delivered by email, it’s not surprising that a large majority claimed to be regular users of email whose preferred option was to receive PACA news via an email newsletter. It was gratifying though that around 90% of you had received and read all four of the latest issues of The Digger. Half of you offered your contact details and a promise of some kind of help. A big thank-you to you and we’ll be in touch soon.

**Anne Harrison**



## Trees, Lovely Trees. Plant the right tree for your plot and for your neighbours.

Trees can be a great addition to any plot providing nectar for pollinators as well as useful crops and they certainly add to the attractiveness of the site as a whole. However careful thought is required. Our rules state that only crop bearing trees should be planted.

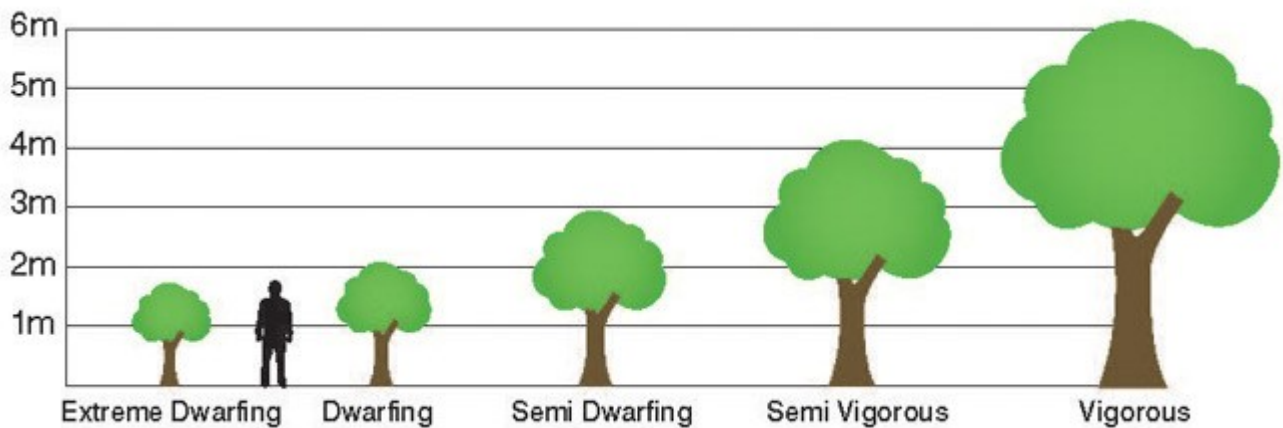
Large forest or purely ornamental trees are definitely not appropriate. Trees should not be planted too close to pathways or where they will cast unacceptable levels of shade over neighbouring plots.

Fruit trees you buy from suppliers are produced by grafting the desired fruit on to the parent stock and it is this "parent" that will determine the size the tree will eventually reach.

We advise that you choose "pillar" fruit trees on a dwarfing stock which will produce relatively little shade. Even these smaller varieties will grow to around 8 feet and careful pruning is required. For most fruit this is in the winter. The exceptions are plums or gages which need pruning in the spring

or early summer. We strongly recommend that you consult your supplier to establish: the rootstock name, the rootstock type (i.e. whether it is dwarfing, semi dwarfing, semi vigorous or vigorous) and also the ultimate height to be reached. See the chart below to get an idea.

Most trees container grown can be planted at any time, so get planning for that lovely spring blossom and plentiful supplies of fruit.



**13 year old  
Conference  
Pear tree**



**Recently pruned  
Apple tree**



**Apple trees recently  
pruned**



**13 year old  
Victoria Plum tree  
awaiting spring pruning**

*Our thanks to Doig Simmonds for this article and the pictures which accompany it and to the Thompson and Morgan website for the chart.*

## Current Flooding: Chairman's Update

The current spell of very wet weather has caused more problems of flooding on many plots. We are looking into spending some of our funds on clearing the existing drainage ditches and making sure they can drain effectively into the River Brent at the bottom (northern) end of the site. However it's unlikely that this will solve the problem when we have prolonged spells of heavy rain and the ground becomes saturated during the winter. The new land drainage to the adjoining park, whilst helping, can't overcome these problems on the low-lying ground where our site is situated. For those whose plots are affected our advice remains as before; to dig drainage ditches around the edge of your site to collect the surplus water and allow it to filter slowly into the ground.